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CLAIMS

1.   A method for accessing an information resource, comprising the steps of:

(i)   receiving a user query;

(ii)   comparing portions of the user query with phrases in a set of predefined phrases to find one or more matching phrases;

(iii)   identifying, using predefined relationships between said predefined phrases and predefined concepts in an ontology, one or more concepts relevant to said portions of the received user query; and

(iv)   identifying, using predefined relationships between predefined actions and said predefined concepts, one or more actions relevant to the received user query, wherein an action comprises providing access to an information resource.

2.   A method according to Claim 1, wherein said predefined concepts comprise task concepts and non-task concepts, and wherein the ontology defines, for each task concept, an indication of the number of non-task concepts required to implement a corresponding task.

3.   A method according to Claim 1 or Claim 2, wherein said relationships between said predefined phrases and said predefined concepts in the ontology are fuzzy relationships each represented by a respective fuzzy support value.

4.   A method according to any one of claims 1 to 3, further comprising the step:

(v)   in the event that a relevant task concept is not identified at step (iii), using a default task concept at step (iv) to identify a relevant action.

5.   A method according to any one of the preceding claims, further comprising the step:

(vi)   in the event that said one or more concepts identified at step (iii) are insufficiently specific to enable a relevant action to be identified at step (iv), identifying from the ontology one or more further concepts related to those identified at step (iii) and requesting input from the user to select one or more of said further concepts for use in step (iv) to identify a relevant action.

6.   An information retrieval apparatus, comprising:

an input for receiving a user query;

an ontological database for storing an ontology defining relationships between a plurality of predefined concepts;

a context phrase database for storing predefined context phrases and, for each context phrase, information defining a fuzzy relationship with an associated concept stored in the ontology;

a concept mapper for comparing portions of a received user query with context phrases stored in the context phrase database to thereby identify and output one or more relevant concepts; and

an action selector operable to identify an action in respect of one or more relevant concepts output by the concept mapper, wherein an action comprises providing access to an information resource in response to the received user query.

7.   An apparatus substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.